

Storehouse
Middlesex County
Urbanna, Virginia

HABS No. VA-589

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Washington Office, Division of Design and Construction
Washington 25, D. C.

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
STOREHOUSE OF JAMES MILLS & COMPANY

Address: Lot 29 of Towles Map (1771) or south side of Main or Virginia St., Urbanna, Middlesex County, Virginia

Present Owner: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Undecided

Statement of Significance: Built originally as a storehouse. This building is a striking survival of a colonial mercantile establishment of a succession of Scots merchants. It is undoubtedly one of the earliest extant buildings in the country connected with the handling and probable sale of tobacco. Its importance to the Historic American Buildings Survey is that of a rare, perhaps unique type-specimen of a modest business structure to be found in Virginia port towns during the eighteenth century.

The building's historical and architectural values come into clearer focus with the application of criteria employed by the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings of the National Park Service. The Storehouse meets three evaluating standards as follows:

Structures or sites in which the broad cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the Nation is best exemplified, and from which the visitor may grasp the larger patterns of our American heritage. Such sites are naturally the points or bases from which the broad aspects of prehistoric and historic American life can best be presented. (As symbolic link with the economic phase of Virginia colonial history, the building is deserving of a key role in the interpretation of the tobacco story.)

Structures which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type-specimen, exceptionally valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction; or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius reflected his age. (The Storehouse is a rare documented example, as noted above.)

All historical and archeological sites and structures in order to meet the standards of exceptional importance should have integrity, that is, there should not be doubts as to whether it is the original site or building, original material, or workmanship, and original location. Intangible elements of feeling and association, although difficult to describe, may also be factors in weighing the integrity of a site or structure. (The original fabric survives and an impressive amount of information is available concerning its original appearance.)

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Dr. Wesley Laing's summarized title search covering Lot No. 29 according to Towles' Map of Urbanna, merits quoting in full: This section follows as an Appendix.
2. Date of Erection: Between 1763 and 1767. The latter year the building appeared as a "Store Ho" on William Parry's plat showing the "Prison Bounds". It was then owned by James Mills. Four years later it was the store of James Mills and Company which firm we know owned a warehouse in Urbanna, by 1775. While Dr. Laing's studies prove that this structure was not the warehouse mentioned in the Port Act of 1691, it is well to underscore the importance of its date in relation to known buildings of related use. In this connection Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is making laudable efforts to restore its Miksch Tobacco Shop (1771), and projecting it as the earliest still standing in America.
3. Architect, builder, supplier, etc: Local
4. Original plans, etc.: Unknown

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5. Notes on alterations and additions: As originally built the structure consisted of a main floor, basement and storage loft. There is evidence of a loading platform across the front and of a hoist and door in the west gable end. The present west chimney is recent. The east chimney is original though there is some evidence that the upstairs fireplace may have been rebuilt (hearth appears original). The roof structure itself is entirely rebuilt with many old timbers having been re-used or salvaged from elsewhere. In the loft ceiling and cross partitions having sawed laths bespeak a late date. Stairhall is least changed area of the building. The rail at the head of the stairs is a subsequent addition which apparently made use of the chairrail removed from the northeast room below. The south window lighting the stair well may date from the period when the loft was developed for living accommodations. The doorway from the northeast room directly into the Stairhall was undoubtedly an early change as witness the split laths. The present or matching door may originally have given access to a slightly larger southeast corner room. The present south outside door raises the question whether it was originally door or window developed into a door at such time when an addition was made to the rear. This southeast room is all probability served as office or sleeping quarters for the attendant who was required by law to be on hand at all times. On the basis of the nailing blocks still in place for a chairrail in the northeast room, that area is believed to have better finished-off for a public area, maybe the "store" where articles were displayed for sale. Further close attention to all openings are expected to contribute additional valuable information.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Utilitarian, marked by extra-width doors and 9" x 16" beams in basement.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair, entire north wall settled about five inches out of perpendicular, but stabilized by ties.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 45' x 27'.
2. Foundations: Brick; exterior Flemish bond with irregular English bonding showing inside basement walls. No footings. Water table across east, west, and south sides.

3. Wall construction: Brick laid in Flemish bond.
4. Platform: Across front measuring approximately 11' in width.
5. Openings and Roof: For existing conditions see photographs. Many details demand further study.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Brick cross wall divides basement and main floor into approximately equal areas; Stairhall, small entry and southeast corner room formed by stud partitions to rear of east half of building.
2. Floors: Pine tongue-and-groove flooring overlaid in some areas by modern hardwood floors. Average joist is 4" x 12" with spacing of 24" on centers. There is evidence of brick paving in basement.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: In basement brick walls, framing members, and underside of floor are all whitewashed. Finish of main floor appears to have been plastered and whitewashed. What seems to be specimen of original plaster directly applied to brickwork occur in the northeast corner downstairs and to the right of the fireplace upstairs. Yellowish in quality, it contains oyster shells and covered by layers of whitewash.
4. Doorways and doors: Four and six panel doors on interior, raised panels on one side. All doors need to be carefully checked for re-use, salvage, etc. The board and batten pair in the loft appear late from the cast-iron latch and Victorian lock. Their HL hinges were probably salvaged.
5. Trim: Good examples of early and simple moulded wood trim with beaded boards are preserved in the Stairhall and southeast corner of the building. See Part I for note on chairrail.
6. Hardware: A good amount of wrought-iron hardware survives which needs checking. A few shutter hinges in the basement retain their leather washers.

- D. Site: The Urbanna Storehouse faces north on an attractive hillside setting, overlooking the tobacco rolling road which leads to Urbanna Creek. Today this is a scene of calm serenity, a mood which contrasts drastically with the historic activities commemorated.

E. References:

Dr. Wesley Laing, "Urbanna's Tobacco Warehouse".

Research Report prepared for the Association for the
Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, August 1960.

"Field Notes on the Tobacco Warehouses", prepared by
C. C. Chewning, J. A. Johnston, R. L. Montague, Barton
Palmer, and Henry Taylor, February - August, 1958.

Observations made by the compiler, at the site August 1960.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, HABS
National Park Service
September 1960

Appendix: Owners of Lot No. 29 from the title search of Dr. Wesley Laing, Associate Professor of History, University of Richmond, August 1960.

<u>Date of deed,</u>	<u>location,</u>	<u>lot number</u>	<u>Purchaser</u>	<u>Description</u>
1692, D. B. 2,	1679/90-94,	p. 521-2	William Churchill	
1704, Deeds,	1703-20,	p. 100	Richard Walker	
			James Reid	Purchased from Walker in period of unrecorded deeds
8 June, 1763,	D. B. P. S. 8a,	p. 435	James Mills	One lot on South side of Virginia St. opposite Back Lane, numbered 29.
28 June, 1771,	D. B. 1767-85,	p. 153	James Mills & Co.	Lot whereon Storehouse of Company stands, purchased from above.
6 Jan. 1789,	D. B. 1785-1791,	p. 93	Overton Cosby Co.	Lots 27, 28, 29.
1 July 1823,	D. B. 14,	p. 498	James Ross	Loft which appears in above
27 Nov. 1826,	D. B. 15,	p. 295	John Chew	Admin. of Ross Estate
20 Dec. 1847,	D. B. 20,	p. 145	C. G. Friswold	Admin. <u>debonis non</u> .
20 Dec. 1847,	D. B. 20,	p. 145	Wm. H. Purkins	Lot known by name of "Ross" Old Store House.
30 Nov. 1857,	D. B. 21,	p. 648	Carter Purkins	Purchased by W. H. Purkins from Ross Estate.
18 June 1859,	D. B. 22,	p. 113	P. T. Woodward	Four acres of Purkins Estate as recorded above
10 Jan 1874,	D. B. 25,	p. 237	E. W. & G.P. Beazley	As recorded above
30 Dec. 1875,	D. B. 26,	p. 92	Lizie Healey	" " "
11 May 1886,	D. B. 29,	p. 94	W. H. Berry (to wife in will)	" " "
24 July 1911,	D. B. 42,	p. 226	Farinholt and Ryland	Bounded on West by lot of Ada Gressett.
25 July 1914,	D. B. 44,	p. 287	W. C. Kennard	As previously described
31 Oct. 1919,	D. B. 46,	p. 113	Thos. G. Jones	" " "
24 Dec. 1925,	D. B. 48,	p. 235	R. Finley Gayle	" " "
			A. P. V. A.	